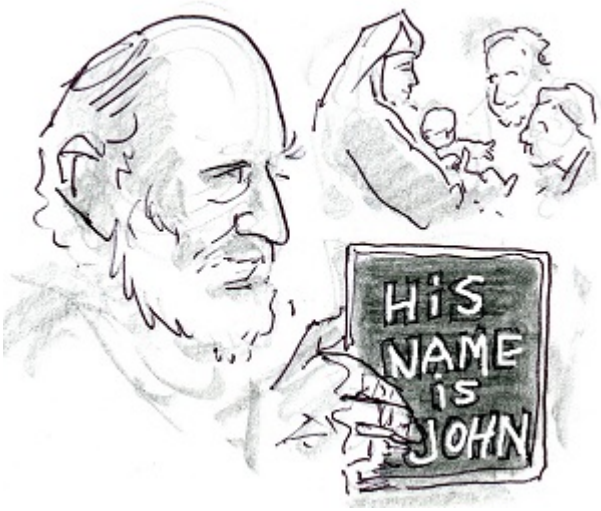
Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





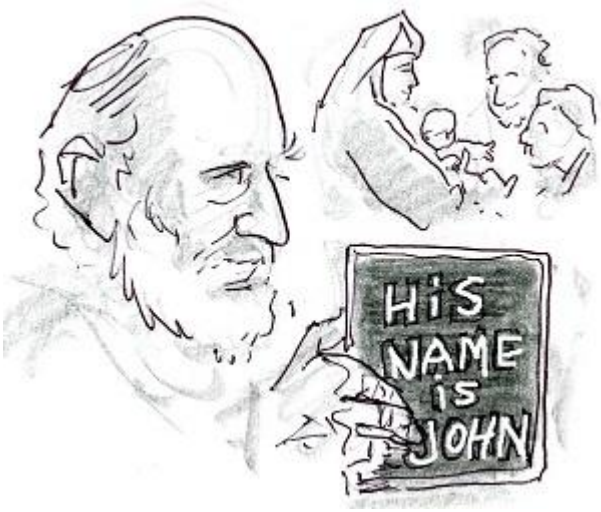
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"Immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue was freed, and he spoke, blessing God" (Luke 1:64).

Mal 3:1-4, 23-24; Luke 1:57-66

Thirty-five years ago, I found myself in the joyful role of a new father calling family to say that mother and child were doing fine. My wife and I had married late (40 plus) and the arrival of a son was not something we even thought possible. The pregnancy felt precarious from the start, and we tried to be prepared for any number of outcomes, but on that special day we knew only a profound joy and sense that we had been blessed. I called my brother and got my nephew Matthew, who would be the evangelist that day to the rest of the family. As we hung up, his child's voice, wanting to be sure he had the message, said, "And John is his name."

On this penultimate day of Advent, anticipating Christmas Eve, we pause to remember the story of the birth of the precursor to Jesus. Though Zechariah and Elizabeth were perfect in the Law, they were childless and now too old to conceive. During his time of service in the Temple, Zechariah is told by the angel Gabriel that they would soon have a son. Because he doubts this miracle, Zechariah is struck dumb. He will have nine speechless months to ponder this promise when Elisabeth miraculously conceives.

When the child is born and family and neighbors gather to celebrate his circumcision, they expect that the boy will be named Zechariah after his father. But Elizabeth says, no, he will be named "John," which means "God is gracious." What the Law could not merit, grace provides. Still mute, Zechariah confirms the name by asking for a tablet and writing, "John is his name."

John the Baptist was destined to be a voice in the wilderness, crying out to a world deaf to the message of repentance, “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths!” Jesus follows, giving sight to the blind, hearing and speech to the deaf and dumb, opening hearts to God’s mercy. As we approach Christmas, God’s graciousness is fulfilled in John and extended to us. We have all been blessed by the arrival of this unexpected child who prepares us now to welcome Jesus.

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